

CIA/DCI/IAM 750531

SECRET--INTELLIGENCE ALERT MEMORANDUM: POSSIBLE COUP ATTEMPT BY

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AZOREAN SEPARATISTS

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Office of the Director

CIA/DCI /IAM 750531

31 May 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President
(National Security Affairs)

SUBJECT: Intelligence Alert Memorandum:
Possible Coup Attempt By
Azorean Separatists

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some Portuguese military units in the Azores are preparing -- in concert with the Azorean Liberation Front (FLA) -- a coup attempt to separate the Azores from Portuguese control, possibly within the next few days. Such a move might have early success but odds are that the Lisbon government would move quickly to suppress it and probably could do so. The US would come in for blame from Lisbon no matter how it came out. If it should fail, US efforts to renegotiate base facilities at Lajes would be complicated, perhaps fatally.

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4. Most of the approximately 1000 army troops stationed in the islands are Azorean natives. These troops might be joined by the roughly 600-man police and Fiscal Guard forces, but would likely run into opposition from navy and air force units -- numbering about 200 and 650 respectively -- which are principally composed of mainland troops and officers. Relatively small leftist civilian groups would likely also oppose the move, but a large majority of the populace would probably acquiesce in the move if not support it.

5. The reaction from the mainland would probably be tough. The Lisbon government considers the Azores an integral part of Portugal and the Armed Forces Movement would see an Azorean coup as a direct challenge to its leadership and one that might spread to other parts of Portugal. Additionally, the Portuguese leadership has probably picked up many of the same reports we have that General Spínola might use the Azores to launch his own effort to recapture power in Lisbon, and this would add to their desire to suppress an uprising. It is probable that Lisbon already knows something of this movement.

6. As for Lisbon's capability to suppress a separatist movement, odds are that it could do so, though the job might pose some difficulty in putting together an expeditionary force. And the scope of the task would depend on circumstances in the Azores -- particularly how much local military support the separatists had. If the Portuguese part of the Lajes base were available to Lisbon, it has the airlift capacity and troops to put forces there rapidly -- probably within 3 or 4 days. But if the rebels succeeded in seizing that airfield, Lisbon would be forced to resort to sea transport. This

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would require several more days for the navy to commandeer ships and about 60 hours steaming time from Lisbon to the Azores. There would be difficulties in landing if the separatists and the local military had control of the harbor, particularly at Ponta Delgada. In sum, Lisbon might face a difficult and uncertain prospect if the separatists had indeed full local military support and moved quickly to consolidate control. But the size and quality of the local military makes it questionable that this would prove to be the case.

7. The US would undoubtedly be linked to any Azorean coup attempt in the minds of most Portuguese. Many prominent Portuguese-Americans have tied to Azorean independence movements, and this is well known in Lisbon.

8. A coup attempt, whether it succeeded or not, would engender charges in many Western European circles about US complicity -- almost regardless of the facts. Most West Europeans are alarmed about trends in Portugal, but they have not given up on it, and many would condemn the alleged US role as an unfriendly act toward a NATO ally. This view would be more pronounced on the left (including Socialist) and in press and parliamentary circles than elsewhere in the European governments, but it would constitute a political complication in NATO. There is little likelihood that any European nation would support the move and probably none would extend recognition to an independent Azorean government unless they had given up on Portugal as a member of NATO and the independence movement had clearly consolidated its control.

9. The Intelligence Community is keeping the situation under close watch.

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10. This memorandum has been discussed with offices in DIA, NSA, INR and CIA.

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W. B. Colby

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